HORROR
AN ENTERTAINING COMIC
NO. 33
OCT.-NOV.
THE VAULT OF HORROR
AN ENTERTAINING COMIC
10¢
FEATURING...
THE VAULT-KEEPER
THE CRYPT-KEEPER
THE OLD WITCH

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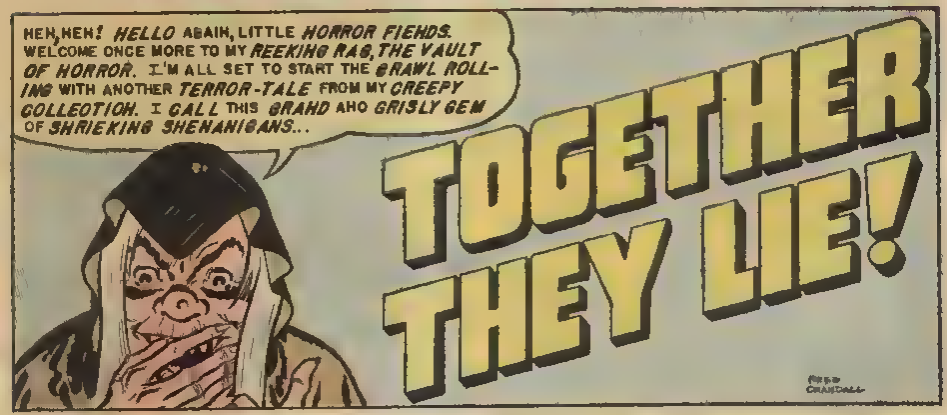
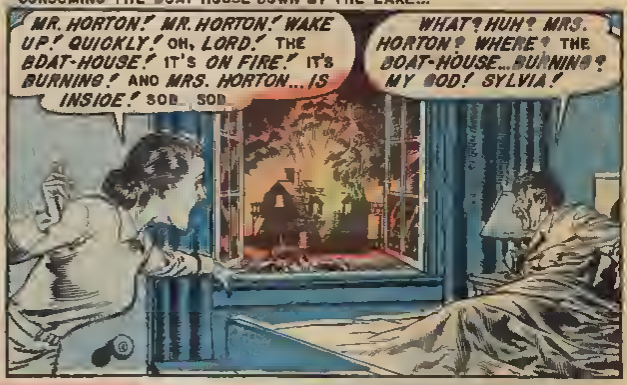
THE VAULT OF HORROR!®



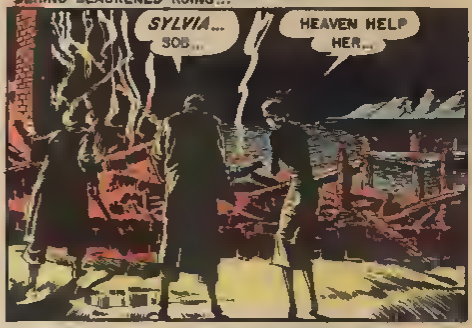
OVERHEAD, THE SKY IS A DISMAL GREY. A DISTANT RUMBLE OF THUNDER SEEMS TO MUTTER THE THREAT OF A COMING STORM. THERE IS A DEATH-SILENCE HANGING OVER THE CEMETERY, BROKEN ONLY BY THE PITIFUL SOBBING OF BLACK-DRAPED AGNES WHEATLEY, THE DECEASED MAN'S HOUSEKEEPER. SHE STANDS AT THE FOOT OF THE YAWNING GRAVE, HER FACE BURIED IN HER HANDKERCHIEF. THE OTHER MOURNERS SHIFT UNCOMFORTABLY, WATCHING THE GRAVEDIGGERS STEP FORWARD AND BEGIN SHOVELING THE DAMP EARTH BACK INTO THE EXCAVATION UPON THE SIMPLE COFFIN. AN ODDLY SHAPED HEADSTONE RESTS NEARBY, THE DATE OF DEATH RECENTLY CARVED INTO ITS WEATHERED SURFACE.

IT BEGAN ONE NIGHT ON THE HORTON ESTATE WHERE AGNES WHEATLEY WAS EMPLOYED AS HOUSEKEEPER. IT BEGAN WITH AN ORANGE GLOW IN THE NIGHT SKY... A FIRE, RAMPAGING WILDLY, LEAPING AND CRACKLING, CONSUMING THE BOAT-HOUSE DOWN BY THE LAKE...



ALEX HORTON LEAPED FROM HIS BED AND RAN WILDLY OUT OF HIS PALATIAL MANSION TOWARDS THE ROARING INFERNO, MRS. WHEATLEY FOLLOWING...

BY THE TIME ALEX REACHED THE BOAT-HOUSE, THERE WAS NOTHING THAT COULD BE DONE... NOTHING EXCEPT WATCH THE FLAMES LEVEL IT TO A PILE OF SMOLDERING BLACKENED RUINS...



LATER, WHEN THE ASHES HAD COOLED, THE FIREMEN PROBED THE LEVELED REMAINS...

AGNES TRIED TO DISCOURAGE MR. HORTON...

..AND SO FOR THE LAST TIME, MR. HORTON GAZED UPON THE CHARRED REMAINS OF HIS BELOVED WIFE...

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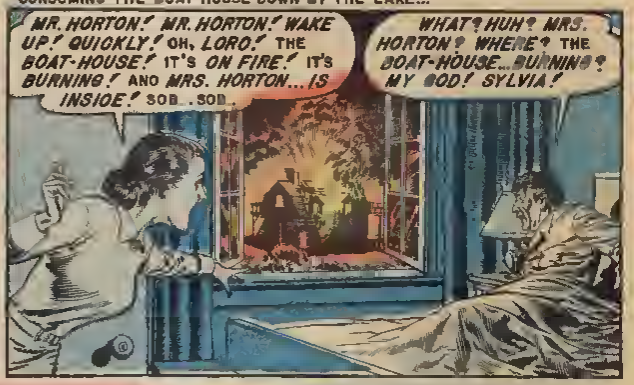

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ALEX HORTON HAD BEEN A DEVOTED HUSBAND HE'D LOVED HIS WIFE DEARLY. HE'D TAKEN HER LOSS VERY HARD, SHUTTING HIMSELF AWAY FROM HIS BUSINESS, HIS FRIENDS, THE WORLD, TO MOURN HER. AGNES WHEATLEY TRIED HER BEST TO COMFORT HIM...

IT'S BEEN A *MONTH* SINCE THE *FUNERAL*, MR. HORTON. YOU *CAN'T* JUST *SIT AROUND LIKE THIS*. YOU CAN'T *CHANGE THINGS*. YOU'RE STILL *YOUNG*... STILL *ALIVE*...

NO! I'M *DEAD*, AGNES! MY *LIFE* HAS *LEFT* ME. IT LIES *BURIED* IN THE *CEMETERY* OUT THERE...

IN LIFE, ALEX HAD BEEN LOATH TO LEAVE SYLVIA'S SIDE.. EVEN FOR THE SHORT BUSINESS TRIPS HE'D BEEN FORCED TO MAKE. AFTER HER DEATH, HE'D ORDERED A SPECIAL GRAVESTONE...

...A *LARGE DOUBLE STONE*, WITH MY *WIFE'S NAME* ON THE *RIGHT*... *MINE* ON THE *LEFT*...SO THAT... AS IN *LIFE*... WE WILL AGAIN BE *SIDE BY SIDE*... IN ETERNAL *DEATH!*

I UNDERSTAND, MR. HORTON...

THE DOUBLE MONUMENT HAD BEEN EXECUTED WITH SYLVIA'S NAME, BIRTH-DATE AND DEATH-DATE INSCRIBED ON THE RIGHT.. AND ALEX'S NAME AND BIRTH-DATE ON THE LEFT, WITH A BLANK SPACE FOR HIS DEATH-DATE...

YES. YES. *EXACTLY* WHAT I *WANTED*. YOU WILL MAKE ARRANGEMENTS TO HAVE IT PLACED UPON MY CEMETERY PLOT...

OF COURSE, MR. HORTON.

ALEX HORTON 1908-

SYLVIA HORTON 1910-1953

AND EVERY SUNDAY, AGNES WOULD ACCOMPANY MR. HORTON TO THE CEMETERY AND STAND AND WATCH HIM PLACE FLOWERS BEFORE THE HUGE DOUBLE STONE AND LISTEN TO HIS SAD VOICE...

SOMEDAY, WE'LL BE *TOGETHER AGAIN*, SYLVIA. SOMEDAY...

SOB... SOB.

ONE NIGHT, MITCH FAIRCHILD VISITED ALEX. MITCH WAS THE HORTON'S LAWYER..

ABOUT YOUR *WILL*, ALEX. NOW THAT *SYLVIA* HAS PASSED ON, YOU'LL BE NAMING A *NEW BENEFICIARY*..

OH I HADN'T *THOUGHT* ABOUT IT, MITCH...

I'LL GIVE YOU A RIBB IN A *DAY* OR SO. I'LL *PROBABLY GIVE IT ALL TO SOME CHARITY, NOW*. IT DOESN'T *MATTER* ANY-MORE...

SOME *CHARITY!?* ER.. WELL, *SUIT YOURSELF*, ALEX. IT'S *YOUR MONEY*...

AGNES OPENED THE DOOR FOR MITCH WHEN HE WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE. ALEX NEVER NOTICED THE LOOK THAT PASSED BETWEEN THEM..

IT WAS ON THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY AT THE CEMETERY THAT AGNES BROKE DOWN. SHE'D BEEN WATCHING HER EMPLOYER, LISTENING TO HIS SAD VOICE, AND FINALLY, SHE BURST OUT CRYING...
SOMEDAY, WE'LL BE TOGETHER AGAIN, SYLVIA. SOMEDAY.
STOP IT! STOP IT! I CAN'T STAND THIS ANY LONGER. SHE DOESN'T DESERVE THIS...
ALEX STARED AT HIS HOUSEKEEPER...
WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, AGNES?
SHE DOESN'T DESERVE THIS. SHE DECEIVED YOU AND SHE DOESN'T MERIT YOUR GRIEF. I CAN'T LET YOU GO ON LIKE THIS. YOU'VE GOT TO KNOW THE TRUTH!
AGNES TURNED AWAY, SOBBING.
SHE NEVER LOVED YOU. SHE MARRIED YOU FOR YOUR MONEY. SHE LOVED SOMEONE ELSE.
YOU'RE LYING!
NO! IT'S THE TRUTH. SHE WAS CARRYING ON WITH HIM.. BENIND YOUR BACK. I NEVER TOLD YOU BECAUSE I WANTED TO PROTECT YOU. I DIDN'T WANT TO SEE YOU HURT..
I DON'T BELIEVE YOU! WHO WAS IT? TELL ME!
IT WAS MR FAIRCHILD... YOUR LAWYER. SHE USED TO MEET HIM... IN THE BOAT-HOUSE... AFTER YOU'D GONE TO SLEEP..
NO! NO! IT ISN'T TRUE...
AGNES OPENED HER POCKETBOOK. SHE PULLED OUT A LETTER.
HERE! READ THIS. HERE'S THE PROOF YOU WANT. MRS. HORTON USED TO GET LETTERS LIKE THIS ALL THE TIME..
GIVE IT TO ME.
ALEX READ THE LETTER WITH TEAR-FILLED EYES...
'MY BELOVED SWEETHEART,
LAST NIGHT, IN THE BOAT-HOUSE, WAS A MOMENT OF HEAVEN. WHEN ALEX IS DEAD, AND HIS MONEY IS YOURS, WE WILL GO AWAY AND BE TOGETHER ALWAYS INSTEAD OF HAVING TO STEAL THOSE PRECIOUS HEAVENLY MOMENTS. ONLY YOUR LOVE FOR ME GIVES ME THE PATIENCE TO WAIT—
I LOVE YOU. MITCH.'
CHOKE

ALEX READ THE LETTER OVER AGAIN AND AGAIN, UNBELIEVINGLY..

DON'T YOU *SEE*? THEY MEANT TO *KILL* YOU!

OH.. NO.

AGNES'S VOICE WAS FILLED WITH HATE...

ONLY SHE *RUINED* IT *ALL*... THAT *NIGHT* SHE *DIED*. THEY'D BEEN *TOGETHER*..AS *USUAL*... *DRINKING* AND...SOB...

"ONLY, WHEN MITCH *LEFT*, SHE *CONTINUED* TO DRINK, INSTEAD OF SNEAKING BACK TO THE HOUSE AS I'D WATCHED HER DO SO MANY TIMES BEFORE. SHE *PASSED OUT*, KNOCKING OVER THE *HURRICANE LAMP*."

"I WATCHED THE KEROSENE POOL OUT OVER THE RUG... WATCHED THE FLAMES LEAP UPON IT...SWEEP THROUGH THE ROOM..."

I *COULD* HAVE *SAVED* HER... BUT I...SOB...I *LET* HER *DIE*! SHE *DESERVED* IT... SOB. SHE WAS *NO GOOD*. AND SHE *DOESN'T DESERVE YOUR GRIEF*...

AGNES! I...I *DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY*! THIS...THIS IS SUCH A *SHOCK* TO ME!

I'VE BEEN A *GOOD* AND *FAITHFUL SERVANT* TO YOU, MR. HORTON. IF..IF YOU *WANT*, YOU CAN TURN ME OVER TO THE *POLICE*. I'VE *DONE WRONG*, I GUESS.

NO, AGNES! YOU *DID RIGHT*. IT'S JUST THAT I WAS SO *BLIND*...SO *VERY BLIND*.

THAT NIGHT, ALEX HORTON RETURNED TO THE CEMETERY WHERE SYLVIA LAY BURIED. HE CARRIED WITH HIM A CHISEL AND MALLET. SAVAGELY, HE SPLIT THE DOUBLE GRAVESTONE IN TWO—

THEN HE RETURNED HOME AND MADE OUT A NEW WILL, NAMING AGNES WHEATLEY, HIS FAITHFUL HOUSEKEEPER, AS SOLE BENEFICIARY.

...AND SO, IN GRATITUDE, I LEAVE ALL OF MY ESTATE TO MISS AGNES WHEATLEY, WHO, THROUGH THE YEARS, HAS PROVEN HERSELF...

THE CHAUFFEUR AND HIS WIFE WERE AROUSED THAT NIGHT AND REQUESTED BY MR. HORTON TO WITNESS THE DOCUMENT...

I'M SORRY TO DISTURB YOU AT THIS HOUR.

OH, THAT'S ALL RIGHT, MR. HORTON! IS THIS WHERE I SIGN?

AND AN HOUR LATER, ALEX HORTON PLACED A GUN TO HIS TEMPLE AND...

HEH, HEH. SO NOW YOU KNOW THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO OUR TOUCHING LITTLE SOB-SCENE, EH, KIDDIES? NOW YOU KNOW WHY AGNES WHEATLEY CRIES HER HEART OUT BEFORE ALEX HORTON'S GRAVE. WOULDN'T YOU CRY IF YOU'D BEEN LEFT THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS? NO? TCH...TCH...

THE GRAVEDIGGERS HAVE REFILLED THE GRAVE AND THE MOURNERS WAIT FOR AGNES TO LEAVE. BUT SHE DOES NOT TURN. SHE JUST STANDS THERE BEFORE THE MOUND WITH THE JAGGED-EDGED GRAVESTONE AT ITS HEAD...

COME, AGNES... IT'S ALL OVER.

THE REST OF YOU CAN GO. LET ME STAY A WHILE...

MITCH FAIRCHILD, THE LAWYER, STEPS FORWARD...

GO AHEAD, ALL OF YOU! I'LL STAY WITH HER...

SOB.. SOB...

THE MOURNERS FILE OFF, AND AGNES STANDS WITH HER HEAD IN HER HANDS, SOBBING QUIETLY...

THEY'VE ALL GONE..

AGNES LIFTS HER HEAD. A BROAD SMILE ON HER FACE...

WE'RE *RICH*, BABY..

I'VE GOT TO *NAND* IT TO YOU, AGGIE!

HE *FELL* FOR THAT *STORY* I *SPUN* HIM ABOUT HIS *WIFE BEING UNFAITHFUL*...

WE *NAD* TO DO *SOMETHING*! THE *FOOL* WAS GOING TO *LEAVE THE DOUGH TO CHARITY*!

AND ALL OF OUR *WORK* WOULD HAVE BEEN *WASTED*. WE WOULD'VE *TIED HER UP* AND *DRAGGED NER OOWN TO THE BOAT-NOUSE* AND *SET FIRE TO IT* FOR *NOTHING*! *KILLED HER FOR NOTNING*!

BUT, HOW DID YOU *CONVINCE* HIM? YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY *PROOF*..

THIS *LETTER*! THIS LETTER *YOU* WROTE TO *ME*! I *SHOWED* IT TO HIM. I TOLD HIM *YOU WROTE IT TO SYLVIA*...*HIS WIFE*!

YOU *MEAN*...HAH... YOU MEAN *I* WAS SUPPOSED TO BE *SYLVIA'S LOVER*?

I TOLD HIM *SHE'D* BEEN MEETING YOU AT THE *BOAT-HOUSE*! AND THAT THE NIGHT SHE *DIED*, SHE'D GOTTEN *DRUNK* AND *KNOCKED OVER A HURRICANE LAMP*..

THAT'S A LAUGH. WE SPILLED ENOUGH *KEROSENE* AROUND THE PLACE TO FILL UP *FIFTY LAMPS*.

THEY STARTED OFF, ARM IN ARM, LAUGHING...

THE *POOR STUPID FOOL*. HE WAS *SO ANGRY*, HE CAME OUT HERE AND *SPLIT* THAT DOUBLE MONUMENT IN *TWO*. HE LEFT WORD THAT HE WANTED TO BE BURIED AT THE *OTHER END* OF THE *CEMETERY* WITH *HIS HALF*..

HAH!

THEIR LAUGHTER FADED AND THE GREY SKY SEEMED TO HANG HEAVIER...AND ONCE AGAIN CAME A DISTANT RUMBLE OF THUNDER, MUTTERING THE WARNING OF THE COMING STORM...

DEATH IS A STRANGE STATE. THE BODY LIES IMMOBILE, DECAYING, FALLING TO DUST. WORDS THAT THE BODY HEARS TAKE TIME TO PENETRATE INTO THE DEAD BRAIN. TAKE TIME TO BE ASSIMILATED... TAKE TIME FOR THEIR MEANING TO BE UNDERSTOOD. IT WAS OVER SIX MONTHS LATER THAT THE THREATENED STORM FINALLY BROKE. THE SOFT GRAVE EARTH BEFORE THE JAGGED HEADSTONE CRUMBLED... THE BODY PUSHED UPWARD...

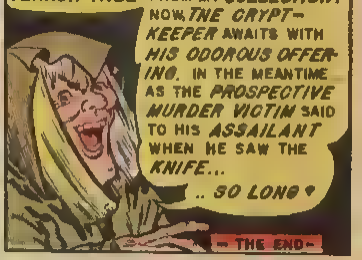
THE THING MOVED AWKWARDLY FORWARD... STUMBLING ON DECAYED LEGS COVERED WITH SLIME...

BITS OF FLESH FELL AWAY AS IT TOTTERED OVER THE COUNTRYSIDE. FINALLY IT STOOD BEFORE THE HORTON MANSION, GRINNING IN AT THE COUPLE SEATED BEFORE THE FIRE

AS THE FRENCH DOORS SMASHED OPEN AND THE ROTTED AND FOUL-SMELLING THING CAME THROUGH, MITCH AND AGNES SCREAMED

THEY FOUND THE LAWYER'S AND THE HOUSEKEEPER'S BODIES IN THE CEMETERY THE NEXT MORNING, LYING GROTESQUELY BESIDE THE DOUBLE GRAVESTONE THAT HAD BEEN CAREFULLY FITTED TOGETHER DURING THE NIGHT...

HEH, HEH. YEP, KIDDIES. *SYLVIA* AND *ALEX* ARE *SIDE BY SIDE AGAIN*... IN *DEATH*, AS IN *LIFE*. AND, UNLESS ONE LOOKS *CAREFULLY* THESE DAYS, ONE CAN *HARDLY TELL* THAT THEIR *DOUBLE GRAVESTONE* WAS *EVER SPLIT IN TWO*. WELL, I'LL BE *BACK* A LITTLE *LATER* WITH *ANOTHER TERROR-TALE* FROM MY *COLLECTION*. NOW, *THE CRYPT-KEEPER* AWAITS WITH *HIS ODOROUS OFFERING*. IN THE MEANTIME AS THE *PROSPECTIVE MURDER VICTIM* SAID TO HIS *ASSAILANT* WHEN HE SAW THE *KNIFE*... .. SO LONG ♥



– THE END –

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! *FOND FELICITATIONS, FIENDS.* WELCOME, NOW, TO *THE CRYPT OF TERROR.* THIS IS YOUR M.C. (MORBID CREEP), *THE CRYPT-KEEPER,* READY TO RELATE ANOTHER *REVOLTING ROMANCE* FROM MY *COLLECTION* HERE IN *THE CRYPT.* FOR MY *GRUESOME GUEST-SPOT* IN *V.K.'S MAG,* I HAVE CHOSEN A *CHERISHED CHILLER*... A *TOUCHING TERROR-TALE*... A *FOUL FAVORITE* OF MINE. IT CONCERNS A *SMALL GROUP OF CHILDREN* ENGAGED THE *DELIGHTFUL TASK* OF HOLDING A *MOCK FUNERAL. I CALL* THIS *BLOOD-CURDLING TALE*...

LET THE PUNISHMENT FIT THE CRIME!

THE SKY HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO DARKEN WHEN THE CHILDREN, DRESSED IMPECCABLY IN THEIR BEST SUNDAY CLOTHES, CAME SLOWLY UP THE STREET, CARRYING THE CRUDE WOODEN COFFIN ON THEIR SMALL SHOULDERS. THEIR LITTLE MOUTHS WERE SET GRIMLY... THEIR EYES GLISTENING WITH TEARS. MR. COOTES LOOKED UP FROM HIS GARDENING WORK AND GRINNED...

WELL, *I'LL BE DURNED.*

MR COOTES CHUCKLED SOFTLY AS THE PROCESSION PASSED UP THE STREET TOWARD THE EMPTY LOT AT THE FAN CORNER. HE CALLED TO MRS. COOTES, WHO SAT DOZING IN THE ROCKER ON THE FRONT PORCH...

CLARA! LOOK AT THEM *CUNNIN' KIDS,* WILL YOU!? *THEY'RE* HAVIN' A REGULAR *FUNERAL!*

NUH? WHERE, EDWIN? WE'LL *I'LL BE..*

CLARA COOTES ROSE, STRETCHED, EASED HERSELF DOWN THE PORCH STEPS, AND STOOD BESIDE HER CHUCKLING HUSBAND..
AIN'T THAT THE CUTEST THING YOU EVER SAW, CLARA? I'LL BET SOME PET CAT OR DOG GOT ITSELF KILLED AN THEY'RE BURYIN' IT!
KIDS ARE ALWAYS DOIN' CUTE THINGS LIKE THAT, EDWIN! AREN'T THEY DARLING?
SO THEY WENT AN' DONE IT!
HERBERT DRAPER, THE COOTES'S NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR AND THE TOWN'S SOLE UNDERTAKER, SHOOK HIS HEAD IN AMAZEMENT AS THE GRIM ENTOURAGE MOVED PAST HIS FRONT YARD..
WENT AND DID WHAT, MR DRAPER?
WHY.. WENT AN' HELD THAT FUNERAL THEY SAID THEY WANTED TO HOLD, MRS. COOTES. I THOUGHT THEY WAS KIDDIN'!
MR. COOTES LAUGHED AT MR. DRAPER
THEY'RE HORNIN' IN ON YOUR RACKET, EH, HERB?
FUNNY THING, ED! THEY STOPPED BY THE PARLOR THIS AFTERNOON, STARTED ASKIN' ALL KINDS OF QUESTIONS.
'COUNSE, I JUST HUMORED 'EM ALONG.'
WHY THE SUDDEN INTEREST IN THE DETAILS OF FUNERAL CEREMONIES, KIDS?
WE'RE GONNA HAVE ONE, MR DRAPER. TELL US WHAT WE'RE S'POSED T'DO!
WELL... FIRST OF ALL, YOU GOTTA MAKE A NICE COFFIN OUTTA PINE. THEN EVERYBODY GETS DRESSED UP REAL FINE IN THEIR SUNDAY BEST AND YOU CARRY THE COFFIN TO THE [illegible]...
WE'RE GONNA USE THE OLD LOT...
GOOD ENOUGH, I GUESS. LET'S SEE— THEN YOU DIG A HOLE AND PUT THE COFFIN IN AND SOMEBODY SAYS SOME NICE WORDS ABOUT THE DEPARTED AND YOU FILL UP THE HOLE AND PUT SOME FLOWERS ON IT AND YOU'RE ALL DONE..
SEE, MR. DRAPER. THANKS! THANKS A LOT...
MR. DRAPER SHOOK HIS HEAD, STARING AFTER THE SAD LITTLE GROUP..
I NEVER THOUGHT THEY WAS SERIOUS, THOUGH. I THOUGHT THEY WAS PULLIN' MY LEG. HMMM! LOOK AT 'EM!
WELL, FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD! WHAT'S GOIN' ON?
DAILY NEWS
2

OLD DOC STACEY, THE TOWN DOCTOR, SCRATCHED HIS HEAD AS HE STARED AT THE PROCESSION MOVING ALONG THE STREET IN THE GATHERING TWILIGHT...
OH, EVENIN', DOC! THAT'S SOMETHIN', EH? THE KIDS ARE HAVIN' A FUNERAL! ED SAYS SOME DOG DIED!
YOU KNOW, THEY WERE IN MY OFFICE THIS AFTERNOON..
'AT THE TIME, I DIDN'T THINK ANYTHIN' ABOUT IT. THEY ASKED ME...'
HOW CAN YOU TELL WHEN SOMETHIN'S DEAD, DOC?
WELL... ITS HEART STOPS BEATING, KIDS! WHY... SOMETHIN' DIE?
YEAH, DOC! ER... AN' WHAT DO YOU DO WITH SOMETHIN' IF IT IS DEAD?
WHY... BURY IT, I GUESS. THERE'S NOTHIN' ELSE YOU CAN DO!
DOC STACEY SHRUGGED AS THE PROCESSION PASSED ON UP THE DARKENED STREET...
POOR KIDS! THEY TAKE EVERYTHIN' SO SERIOUS THESE DAYS, WHAT YOU SAY IT WAS THAT DIED, HERB?
WHY... A DOG, I... I THINK...
HMMPH! MORBID KIDS!
FRANK BUNDAGE, THE TOWN'S CANDYSTORE OWNER, STOOD ON HIS FRONT STEPS STARING AT THE SILENT, SAD-EYED CHILDREN...
OH, EVENIN' FRANK! YOU SAY SOMETHIN'?
I SAID THEY'RE MORBID KIDS... THAT'S WHAT I SAID, DOC. ALWAYS INTERESTED IN DEATH AND DYIN'...
DOC STACEY JUST GRINNED...
IT'S PERFECTLY NORMAL FOR KIDS THEIR AGE TO BE CURIOUS ABOUT DEATH, FRANK. AFTER ALL, IT IS ONE OF LIFE'S UNSOLVABLE MYSTERIES.
NOT NATURAL DYIN', DOC. THEY'RE INTERESTED IN VIOLENT DYIN'!
'WHY, JUST T'OTHER DAY THEY ALL STOPPED DOWN AT MY STORE AND THEN ONE OF 'EM SAW THEM HEADLINES... YOU KNOW...'
LOOK! 'KILLER EXECUTED. DIES IN CHAIR'!
GEE! LET'S BUY A COPY! I GOT A PENNY...
MAD
3

'BETWEEN 'EM THEY SCRAPED UP THE NICKLE AND BOUGHT A COPY OF THE PAPER...'
HERE Y'ARE, MR BUNDAGE.
HMMPH!
I TELL YOU, IT AIN'T NATURAL FOR KIDS TO BE SO MORBID ABOUT SOME MANIAC GETTIN' ELECTROCUTED.
GUESS MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT, FRANK. BUT THEY SURE WERE INTERESTED. THEY BROUGHT ME THE PAPER... ASKED ME ALL ABOUT IT...
GEORGE SPARKMAN, THE TOWN ELECTRICIAN, GRINNED OVER THE PICKET FENCE THAT SEPARATED HIS AND FRANK BUNDAGE'S FRONT YARDS...
OH, EVENIN', GEORGE! YOU SAY THEY ASKED YOU 'BOUT THAT STORY...
YEP. WANTED TO KNOW HOW AN ELECTRIC CHAIR KILLS SOMEBODY...
'I TOLE 'EM, I DION'T SEE NO HARM...'
WHY IT SENDS THOUSANDS OF VOLTS THROUGH THE BODY, KIDS. THE SHOCK PARALYZES THE HEART... STOPS EVERYTHIN' FROM FUNCTIONIN'...
AND YUH DIE?
YEP. WHY IT'S JUST LIKE GETTIN' STRUCK BY LIGHTNIN', OR STEPPIN' ON A LIVE WIRE...
THANKS, MR. SPARKMAN!
THE PROCESSION HAD ALMOST REACHED THE LOT, NOW. GEORGE SPARKMAN SMILED AT 'EM...
YEP, THEY SURE WERE INTERESTED IN THAT NEWSPAPER STORY...
YOU MEAN THE ONE ABOUT THE ELECTROCUTION, MR SPARKMAN?
MATILDA PRIDDY, SCHOOLTEACHER, CAME UP THE WALK FROM THE BACK OF HER HOUSE...
THAT'S THE ONE, MISS PRIDDY
STRANGE. THEY BROUGHT THE PAPER TO CLASS YESTERDAY... OR WAS IT THE DAY BEFORE. THEY THEY. WHAT'S GOING ON THERE?
4

GEORGE SHRUGGED..
HERB DRAPER TOLD DOC STACEY THEY'RE BURYIN' A DOG..
OH, ISN'T THAT TOO BAD. ER.. WHAT WAS I SAYING...?
'OH, YES! THEY BROUGHT THAT ARTICLE ABOUT THE ELECTROCUTION TO ME. THEY WANTED TO KNOW..'
WHY DOES HE HAVE TO DIE, MISS PRIDDY?
BECAUSE WE BELIEVE IN CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN THIS STATE, CHILDREN!
WHAT'S CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, MISS PRIDDY?
IT'S PUNISHMENT FOR A CAPITAL OFFENSE LIKE MURDER, FOR INSTANCE.
NEWS
IF SOMEONE TAKES SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE, THEN THE STATE TAKES THE GUILTY PARTY'S LIFE IN PUNISHMENT!
IS ROBBING SOMEBODY A CAPITAL OFFENSE, MISS PRIDDY?
NO, AND I THINK THAT'S ENOUGH! I'M NO LAWYER. NOW IF YOU'LL OPEN YOUR SPELLERS TO...
SPELLING
LAWYER SYE SHUSTER'S BOOMING VOICE INTERRUPTED MISS PRIDDY'S NARRATIVE..
SO YOU SENT THOSE KIDS TO ME, MISS PRIDDY?
I DID NO SUCH THING, MR. SHUSTER!
WELL THEY SURE WERE INTERESTED IN LAW. THEY CAME TO MY OFFICE YESTERDAY ASKIN' ALL KINDS OF QUESTIONS..
ABOUT..ABOUT CAPITAL PUNISHMENT?

"NOT EXACTLY. THEY WANTED TO KNOW WHAT THE PUNISHMENT FOR ROBBERY WAS, AND I TOLD THEM..."
OF COURSE, IT DEPENDS UPON THE JUDGE WHO SENTENCES HIM.
THEN A ROBBER DOESN'T HAVE TO DIE IN THE ELECTRIC CHAIR?
OH, NO! ONLY A CAPITAL CRIME IS PUNISHABLE BY DEATH. LIKE MURDER...OR KIDNAPPING!
KIDNAPPING? WHAT'S KIDNAPPING?
LAWYER SHUSTER GRINNED..
SO I HAD TO EXPLAIN ALL ABOUT KIDNAPPING TO THEM. LOST OVER AN HOUR... THANKS TO YOU, MISS PRIDDY.
WELL, I DIDN'T SEND THEM, MR. SHUSTER! OH, LOOK...
THE GRIM-FACED PROCESSION HAD ENTERED THE LOT, NOW. THEY STOOD SOLEMNLY BEFORE THE CRUDELY DUG PIT...
AREN'T THEY SWEET...
SO SERIOUS, TOO...
SLOWLY, THEY DROPPED THE COFFIN FROM THEIR SHOULDERS AND LOWERED IT INTO THE YAWNING HOLE...
HEH, HEH...
SOMETHIN', EH?
LAWYER SHUSTER LEANED ON HIS NEIGHBOR'S FENCE, WATCHING THE CEREMONY...
KIDS SURE DO STRANGE THINGS THESE DAYS, EH, JUDGE DELANEY...
FUNNY THING YOU SHOULD MENTION THAT, SYE!
THOSE KIDS CAME TO SEE ME IN MY CHAMBERS YESTERDAY. THEY WANTED TO KNOW ALL ABOUT JURY TRIALS!
JURY TRIALS..? WHY?
6

NOW, THE SOLEMN-FACED MOURNERS WERE SHOVELING THE SOIL BACK INTO THE GRAVE UPON THE ROUGHLY HEWN COFFIN. JUDGE DELANEY SHRUGGED...
SEARCH ME! I TRIED TO TELL 'EM AS BEST I COULD. KEPT IT SIMPLE. THEY SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND...
FREDDY! FRE-D-DY! WHERE ARE YOU?
MRS. PHILIPS CAME UP THE STREET, CALLING HER SIX YEAR OLD SON'S NAME. SHE STOPPED FOR A MOMENT, STUDYING THE GRIM GROUP OF FOUR THROUGH SEVEN YEAR OLDS STANDING IN THE EMPTY LOT...
ISN'T FREDDY WITH THEM, MRS. PHILLIPS?
I'M AFRAID NOT, JUDGE DELANEY. THE KIDS DON'T SPEAK TO FREDDY ANY MORE..
OH? WHY NOT?
WELL... FREDDY TOOK SOMETHING FROM ONE OF THEM AND THEY'VE NEVER FORGIVEN HIM FOR IT!
JUDGE DELANEY STARED AT THE LITTLE GROUP TAMPING DOWN THE FRESH GRAVE.
SHUSTER! WHAT DID YOU TELL THEM ABOUT KIDNAPPING?
HUH? WHY... WHY...
I TOLD THEM THAT WHEN SOMEONE STEALS SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILD, THAT'S KIDNAPPING
GASP
MRS. PHILIPS SHUDDERED. A DEAD SILENCE SEEMED TO FALL UPON THE DARKENED STREET. A BREEZE STIRRED, MOVING ALONG, MAKING THE OTHERS SHIVER IN ITS CHILL. THE LAWYER... THE TEACHER, THE ELECTRICIAN... THE REST. MRS. PHILIPS WHISPERED, HORRIFIED...
IT IT WAS EMMA LOU'S DOLL THAT FREDDY TOOK! HE, HE WOULDN'T GIVE IT BACK..
CHOKE ..
GOOD LORD
ACROSS THE STREET, IN THE EMPTY LOT, ONE OF THE CHILDREN WAS SAYING SOME WORDS OVER THE GRAVE OF THE DEPARTED...
HEH, HEH! WELL, KIDDIES, THAT'S MY YELP YARN. SHOCKING? THAT'S WHAT FREDDY SAID WHEN THEY PUSHED HIM INTO THE LIVE WIRE. NOW IT'S TIME TO TURN YOU BACK TO V.K.. I'LL SEE YOU NEXT IN THE OLD WITCH'S REEK-RAG, THE HAUNT OF FEAR. IN THE MEANTIME... AS THE GHOUL SAID WHEN HE STUCK THE REMAINS OF HIS LATEST VICTIM INTO THE DEEP FREEZE, 'KEEP WELL!'

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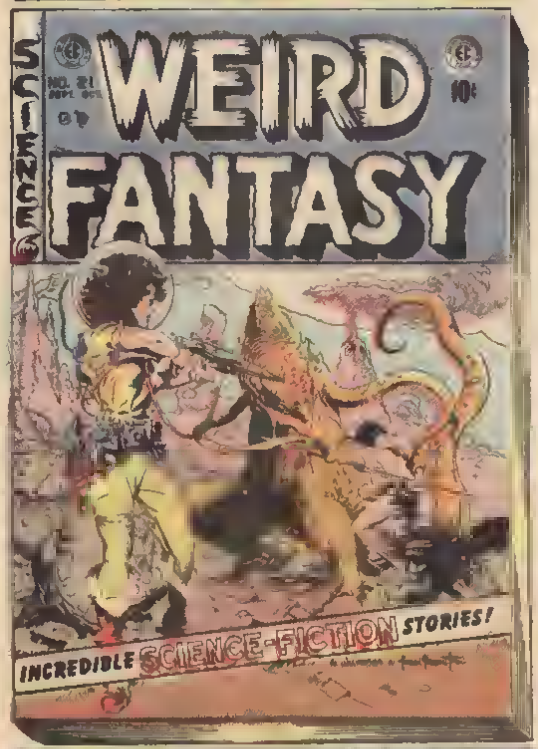

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WRECKER!

Carlson squinted through the tiny cab window: Jaffrey was on the other side of the skeletal structure, working over the wall which Carlson's wrecker had just demolished. Twelve stories up like this, Carlson thought, a fall would prove instantly fatal. And no one could say that the wrecking machine hadn't gotten out of Carlson's control. Jaffrey's death would be listed as accidental . . . one of the things that made wrecking such a dangerous profession!

Carlson sighted along the derrick-like arm projecting in front of his cab, intent on the steel cable which hung from the towering derrick. The iron ball dangling at the end of the metal line was immense: ponderous enough, when crashed against a wall, to reduce concrete to dust. One swipe would certainly send Jaffrey spinning over the side of the half-demolished building!

Carlson's fist tightened on the control knob . . . the derrick slowly moved and the heavy iron ball began to swing like a gargantuan pendulum. Now its arc brought it fifteen yards from Jaffrey . . . now ten . . . now five. Another delicate turn of the knob and the derrick was precisely where it must be if the wrecking ball was to crash into Jaffrey . . .

There was a sickening crunch, a sharp scream of agony and desper-

ately flailing arms. Even as the workers turned in dismay, Carlson leaped from the cab and peered down through the girders. A momentary flash, like that of a figure fading away as it dropped, told the story of Jaffrey's plunge to the street far below. Slowly Carlson straightened up, a smile of triumph flickering across his face. Now there'd be no more trouble from Jaffrey . . . Carlson was once again the unchallenged boss of this labor gang!

He turned and, out of the corner of his eye, saw the steel cable plunging toward *him!* He tried to scramble out of the way, cursing himself for moving from the cab in order to watch Jaffrey's fall. Overhead Carlson heard an ominous roar: saw the cable slashing toward him with incredible speed . . .

Suddenly he felt a searing stab of pain at his throat. He was aware of being lifted bodily and hurled flat against the wooden scaffolding of the temporary floor. Before he could scream aloud he was conscious of the fiery agony running like wild flame through his throat . . . of seeing blood pouring darkly over his eyeballs. Weakly he tried to touch his tortured neck, to soothe the skin that felt as if it had been mangled raw. Then blackness closed in on Carlson like a stifling shroud . . .

A minute later, the workers stood solemnly over Carlson's crumpled body. "T-That steel cable," one man whispered, "it wrapped around his throat like a hangman's noose! T-Tore through his skin the way a knife cuts through butter! I-I never saw a man's head cut off so quickly!"

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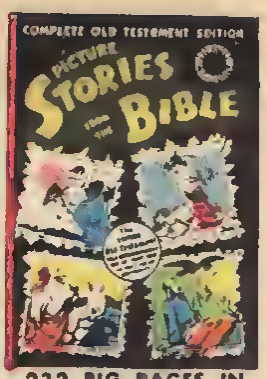

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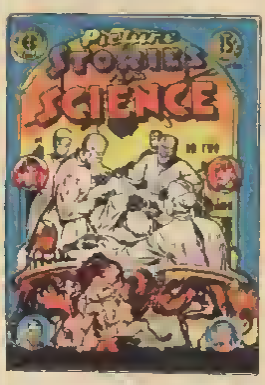

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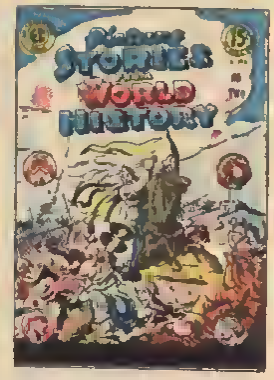

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THE VAULT-KEEPER'S CORNER

A pox on my mercenary idiot editors! They have just informed me that they desire to take over my entire column this issue to announce their latest insidious money-grahhing scheme to "con" a few more coins from your . . . or your old man's . grimy little piggy hank . . . namely, the formation of a national E.C. fan organization! O K , bird-brains . . you're on the hot-air!—V.K.

Thank you, V.K., you old bagel-head, for the confidence-inspiring manner in which you hroke the deliriously happy news to our deliriously happy readers! But hefore launching into the sordid detaits of the club, we would like to sketch in a little background. We started out with two conditions that positively *had* to be *met:*

1) Our club would have to be a *different kind* of fan club . . . a conttnuously active club that would provide long-range interest, enjoyment and henehts for its members! And . . .

2) Our club would have to be a non-*profit* fan club! The Vault-Keeper to the contrary notwithstanding, the only income we at E.C. derive . . or care to derive! . . . from our efforts comes from the *newsstand sales* of our 10c mags. We actualty *lose* a *little* on suhscrip*tions*, and *make very little* on the *annuals* . . . both are primarily offered as *services* to promote good will! If you readers want a fan club, we're more than happy to ohlige . but, again, as a *service, not for profit!*

So here's what we've come up with

1) *THE NAME:* As one reader wrote a while hack, "E.C. magazines are habit-forming." So what could he more logical than to call the organizatton, "THE E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB"?

2) *THE SET-UP:* The E.C. Fan-Addict Club will consist of the national "parent" organization, and local chapters. Everyone who joins will he a member of the national organization In addition, any group of five or more prospective members may join as an *authorized* chapter of the national organization. Each such chapter will he assigned a charter number. The name and address of the elected [illegible] each authorized chapter will be made available to all members, so that those who are not already a member of a chapter will be able to join the one nearest them if they wish to.

3) *WHAT YOU GET:* Each member will receive a full-color 7½ by 10½ membership certificate, suitable for framing; a wallet-size membership identification card; a striking membership patch for sweaters, jackets, etc.; and a very distinguished-looking membership pin!

4) *COST OF JOINING:* Membership in THE E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB will set you hack two hits . . . 25c! This 25c represents the exact cost to us (plus or minus a fraction of a cent!) of one envelope, one stamp, and the above mentioned four items . . . *certificate, card, patch, and pin!* (The cost of Ruhy's and Nancy's loving labor in packing and mailing is lovingly donated by E.C.)

5) POSSIBLE FUTURE PLANS: We are considering publishing an E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB BULLETIN, containing such features as national and local chapter news; advance inside information on new titles, future stories, and special issues, etc.; articles and stories submitted by members, and a "hack-issue trading post!" *Only cluh memhers* would he *eligihle* to subscrihe, *with the price and frequency of publication yet to* he decided upon.

We are also considering some sort of "E.C. Surprise-of-the-Month" plan for members. What the surprises might he, and what we might have to clip you for THfS one, is also as yet undetermined.

6) IF YOU'RE STILL INTERESTED: For an individual membership, send 25c, along with your clearly printed name and address, to:

THE E.C FAN-ADDICT CLUB
Room 706
225 Lafayette Street
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If *five or more* of you wish to join as an *authorized chapter*, enclose each member's name and address, along with 25c for each name, and indicate the name of the elected president. We will notify each president of his chapter's *charter number* . . hut each chapter *memher* will receive his membership credentials, etc , *individually*

So that's it! Meet new friends. Make new enemies. See the world. Spend money. Join THE E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB!!!

(In honor of the occasion, we will forego the usual subscription plug that 6 issues of this, or any other E.C. mag, cost 75c.—ed.)

HERE IS A WELL-FRAMED TALE OF TERROR. I CALL IT...

A SLIGHT CASE of MURDER!

THE NEWSPAPER STORIES AND WORD-OF-MOUTH RUMORS THAT HAD BEEN COMING OUT OF THE TERRORIZED TOWN OF HILLDALE HAD DEEPLY DISTURBED OLD DOCTOR SWANSON, AND HE'D FINALLY PACKED A FEW THINGS INTO AN OVERNIGHT BAG AND TAKEN A TRAIN THERE. NOW, STANDING UPON HILLDALE'S EMPTY STATION PLATFORM, LISTENING TO THE TRAIN WHISTLE FADING IN THE DISTANCE AND GAZING UP AT THE ABANDONED MANSION ON THE FAR HILL OVERLOOKING THE SLEEPY TOWN, THE OLD DOCTOR NODDED GRIMLY...

YEP! THAT'S THE *ANSWER*, ALL RIGHT. THAT'S THE ANSWER TO *ALL THOSE KILLIN'S*.

HILLD

MOULTON'S STORAGE & MOVING

DOC SWANSON STARED AT THE DISTANT RUN-DOWN BOARDED-UP OLD MANSION FOR A FEW MINUTES. THEN HE SHRUGGED, SLOWLY PICKED UP HIS BAG, AND STARTED WEARILY DOWN THE DESERTED DUSTY MAIN STREET AS HE'D STOP BEFORE EACH BUILDING AND STORE, HE'D SMILE OR FROWN OR SHAKE HIS HEAD SADLY AND MOVE ON. THEN, HE CAME TO THE BUILDING HE WAS LOOKING FOR. HE ENTERED...

AFTERNOON, STRANGER MY NAME'S *MOULTON*. I'M *SHERIFF* OF HILLDALE. KIN I *HELP* YOU?

I *CAME* TO HELP *YOU*, SHERIFF MOULTON! I CAME ABOUT THE *MURDERS* YOU BEEN HAVIN'! I THINK I KNOW WHO'S *DOIN' 'EM!* OF COURSE IT'S ONLY A *THEORY*...

SHERIFF MOULTON EYED THE OLD DOCTOR SUSPICIOUSLY..

LISTEN, STRANGER I'M *FULL UP TO HERE* WITH *CRACKPOT THEORIES* 'BOUT THEM *MURDERS*.

THIS IS *NO CRACK-POT THEORY*, SHERIFF I *HAVE* THE *ANSWER*. THE PERSON YOU WANT...

THE SHERIFF LAUGHED...
PERSON? WHAT PERSON? 'TAINT NO PERSON WHAT'S BEEN DOIN' THE KILLIN'S, STRANGER. 'TAIN'T NOTHIN' HUMAN.
OH? AND WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?
THE SHERIFF SAT BACK AND LIT UP HIS PIPE...
THE FACTS PROVE IT WEREN'T NO HUMAN, STRANGER. NO HUMAN BEING COULD'VE COMMITTED THE MURDERS. NO HUMAN BEING COULDA GOTTEN IN...
VOTE
...POINTED THE LIT MATCH AT THE OLD DOC...
TAKE LILA MARTINSON, FOR EXAMPLE. SHE WAS THE FIRST T' DIE. SOMEBODY HEARD HER SCREAMIN' AND PHONED ME UP...
'WHEN I GOT THERE, HER DOOR WAS LOCKED... FROM THE INSIDE. I HAD TO BREAK IT DOWN.
GOOD LORD!
'SHE WAS LAYIN' ON THE FLOOR OF HER ROOM IN A POOL OF BLOOD. SHE LOOKED LIKE SHE'D BEEN ATTACKED BY SOME WILD ANIMAL... ALL TORN AND SLASHED AND CUT-LIKE...!
THIS WINDOW'S LOCKED TOO, SHERIFF.
THAT'S STRANGE. IF'N THE DOOR AND WINDOW WERE BOTH LOCKED FROM THE INSIDE, HOW'D THE MURDERER GET IN OR OUT?
SHERIFF MOULTON PUFFED ON HIS PIPE, SUCKING THE MATCH FLAME INTO THE BOWL TILL THE PACKED TOBACCO GLOWED RED...
SO YOU SEE, STRANGER... WHEN YOU SAY IT'S A PERSON WE'RE LOOKIN' FOR, YOU'RE DEAD WRONG. IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR A PERSON TO GET IN OR OUT OF LILA MARTINSON'S ROOM ACCORDIN' T' THE EVIDENCE.
WEREN'T THERE ANY OTHER OPENINGS IN HER ROOM? A VENT OR A CHIMNEY FLUE?
SHERIFF MOULTON STARED AT THE OLD DOC...
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, THERE WAS A HOT-AIR-VENT IN HER ROOM, BUT IT WASN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR A HUMAN BEING TO CLIMB THROUGH...
NOT AN ORDINARY HUMAN BEING, SHERIFF!

THE SHERIFF'S EYES GLEAMED IN THE MATCH-LIGHT...
WHAT ARE YOU DRIVIN' AT, STRANGER? WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
I KNOW WHO YOUR KILLER IS, SHERIFF! AND I KNOW WHERE TO TRAP HIM!
THE SHERIFF STARED AT OLD SWANSON. THE OLD DOG STOOD UP...
MEET ME AT THE BOTTOM OF MANSION HILL TONIGHT, SHERIFF. I'LL SHOW YOU THE MURDERER...
I'LL BE THERE.. I'LL BE THERE...
VOTE
THE SHERIFF PUFFED THOUGHTFULLY ON HIS PIPE FOR A MOMENT AFTER THE DOG LEFT. THEN HE CURSED AND TOSSED THE MATCH TO THE FLOOR.
@#X?%!
STRANGERS!
OLD DOC SWANSON CONTINUED ON DOWN THE DESERTED MAIN STREET. HIS NEXT STOP WAS A SMALL RUN-DOWN SHOP AT THE FAR END OF TOWN...
IS THIS THE EDITORIAL OFFICE OF THE HILLDALE CLARION... WRIT AND PUBLISHED EVERY OTHER WEEK 'CEPT JULY AND AUGUST BY PHIL INGRAM, ACE REPORTER AND CHIEF TYPE-SETTER...
WELL, I'LL BE A HOG-TIED SON OF A SLOPPY SEA-COOK IF IT AIN'T SAM SWANSON...!
THE WIZENED OLD MAN IN THE GREEN EYE SHADE SHOOK THE OLD DOC'S HAND WARMLY...
WHAT BRINGS YOU BACK TO HILLDALE AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, DOC?
MURDER, PHIL!
OLD PHIL INGRAM'S FACE DARKENED...
STRANGEST DANG MYSTERY THIS TOWN EVER HAD, DOC. FOUR MURDERS, AND EVERY ONE PRACTICALLY THE SAME. FOUR PRETTY YOUNG WOMEN, EACH LOCKED IN NICE AND TIGHT IN THEIR ROOMS WITH NO WAY FOR ANYBODY T'GET IN OR OUT. NOTHIN' HUMAN, THAT IS... AND THEN, ALL OF A SUDDEN, THEY'RE DEAD!
YOU TALK LIKE SHERIFF MOULTON, PHIL!
THE WHOLE TOWN'S CONVINCED THE THING THAT MURDERED THEM FOUR GALS WASN'T HUMAN, DOC. COULDN'T BE!
PERHAPS IT ISN'T HUMAN AFTER ALL, PHIL. ANYWAY, I HAVE A FAVOR T' ASK OF YOU...
3

THAT NIGHT, OLD DOC SWANSON STODD AT THE BOTTOM OF MANSION HILL, WAITING FOR SHERIFF MOULTON.
THAT YOU, SHERIFF?
YEP! IT'S ME! NOW, WHERE'S THE KILLER...?
THE OOC POINTED TO THE ANCIENT EDIFICE LOOMING DARK AND FOREBODING ON THE CREST OF THE HILL
WE'LL FIND THE KILLER UP THERE, SHERIFF.. IN THE OLD BATES MANSION! I'M SURE OF IT!
THE BATES..? SAY. I THOUGHT YOU WERE A STRANGER HERE!
ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF, SHERIFF. I AM DOCTOR SAM SWANSON. I LIVED HERE IN HILLDALE OVER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO. I FIRST STANTED PRACTICIN' MEDICINE HERE...
I KNEW YOU WEREN'T A STRANGER! HOBODY CALLS IT THE BATES MANSION ANYMORE
THEY'D STARTED UP THE HILL TOWARD THE BOARDED-UP OLD MANSION...
BUT WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THE KILLER'LL BE UP THERE, DOC?
JUST A HUNCH, SHERIFF. YOU SEE, SOMETHIN' HAPPENED TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO..UP THERE... IN THAT MANSION... AND I THINK IT'S THE ANSWER...
'I WAS JUST A YOUNG SQUIRT, THEN.. FRESH OUT OF MED SCHOOL. I'D COME TO HILLDALE TO SET UP A PRACTICE. ONE DAY I HAD A VISITOR...'
DOCTOR SWANSON. DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
OF COURSE. YOU'RE AMELIA BATES. YOU LIVE IN THE MANSION UP ON THE HILL OUTSIDE OF TOWN. YOUR HUSBAND IS JOHN BATES, THE FAMOUS WORLD TRAVELER...
'AMELIA BATES WAS GOING TO HAVE A BABY. SHE WANTED ME TO BE THE ATTENDING PHYSICIAN WHEN HER TIME CAME...'
I'D BE DELIGHTED, MRS. BATES. AND.. CONGRATULATIONS, YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND MUST BE VERY HAPPY...
MY HUSBAND WILL NEVER KNOW, DOCTOR. I JUST RECEIVED WORD THIS MORNING THAT HE HAS BEEN KILLED IN AN AIRPLANE CRASH...
'AMELIA BATES WENT INTO HIDING AFTER THAT, AND WHOLY ANYONE IN THE TOWN SAW HER, ALTHOUGH THEY ALL KNEW OF THE COMING EVENT. THEN, ONE DAY... I RECEIVED HER URGENT CALL...'
YOU'D BETTER COME UP RIGHT AWAY, DOCTOR. I THINK — IT'S TIME...
I'LL BE RIGHT THERE, MRS. BATES!

THE TWO MEN—THE AGED DOCTOR AND THE SHERIFF—CLIMBED THE RICKETY OLD STEPS OF THE WEATHERBEATEN ABANDONED MANSION...

AND *YOU...* *DELIVERED* THE WIDOW BATES'S CHILD, DOC?

IF YOU COULD *CALL* IT A *CHILD*, SHERIFF. IT WAS JUST ONE OF THOSE *UNFORTUNATE THINGS*. THE CHILD WAS A *MISSHAPEN MONSTER*...

'ITS *HEAD* WAS *NORMAL*, BUT ITS *BODY* AND *ARMS* AND *LEGS* HAD *NOT DEVELOPED FULLY*. MRS. BATES SAW THE EXPRESSION ON MY FACE AFTER I DELIVERED THE BABY...'

CHOKE...

WHAT *IS* IT, DOCTOR? WHAT'S *WRONG*? *MY BABY...!*

'I TRIED TO TELL HER AS GENTLY AS I COULD. I TRIED TO TALK HER OUT OF KEEPING THE CHILD. BUT SHE INSISTED UPON IT...'

NO MATTER *HOW* MALFORMED IT IS, IT IS *STILL MY BABY*, DOCTOR! AND *HERE IT WILL STAY*... AS *LONG* AS IT *LIVES*. *GIVE IT TO ME...*

MRS. BATES, *WHAT* SHOULD I TELL THE *TOWNSFOLK*...?

'MRS. BATES TOOK HER MONSTROUS CHILD IN HER ARMS...'

YOU CAN *TELL* THE *TOWNSFOLK* THE *BABY WAS BORN DEAD*, DOCTOR! THIS WILL BE *OUR SECRET*! *YOURS* AND *MINE*!

AS YOU WISH, MRS. BATES.

THE DOOR TO THE OLD MANSION SQUEELED OPEN ON TIME-RUSTED HINGES. DOCTOR SWANSON STEPPED INSIDE. THE SHERIFF FOLLOWED...

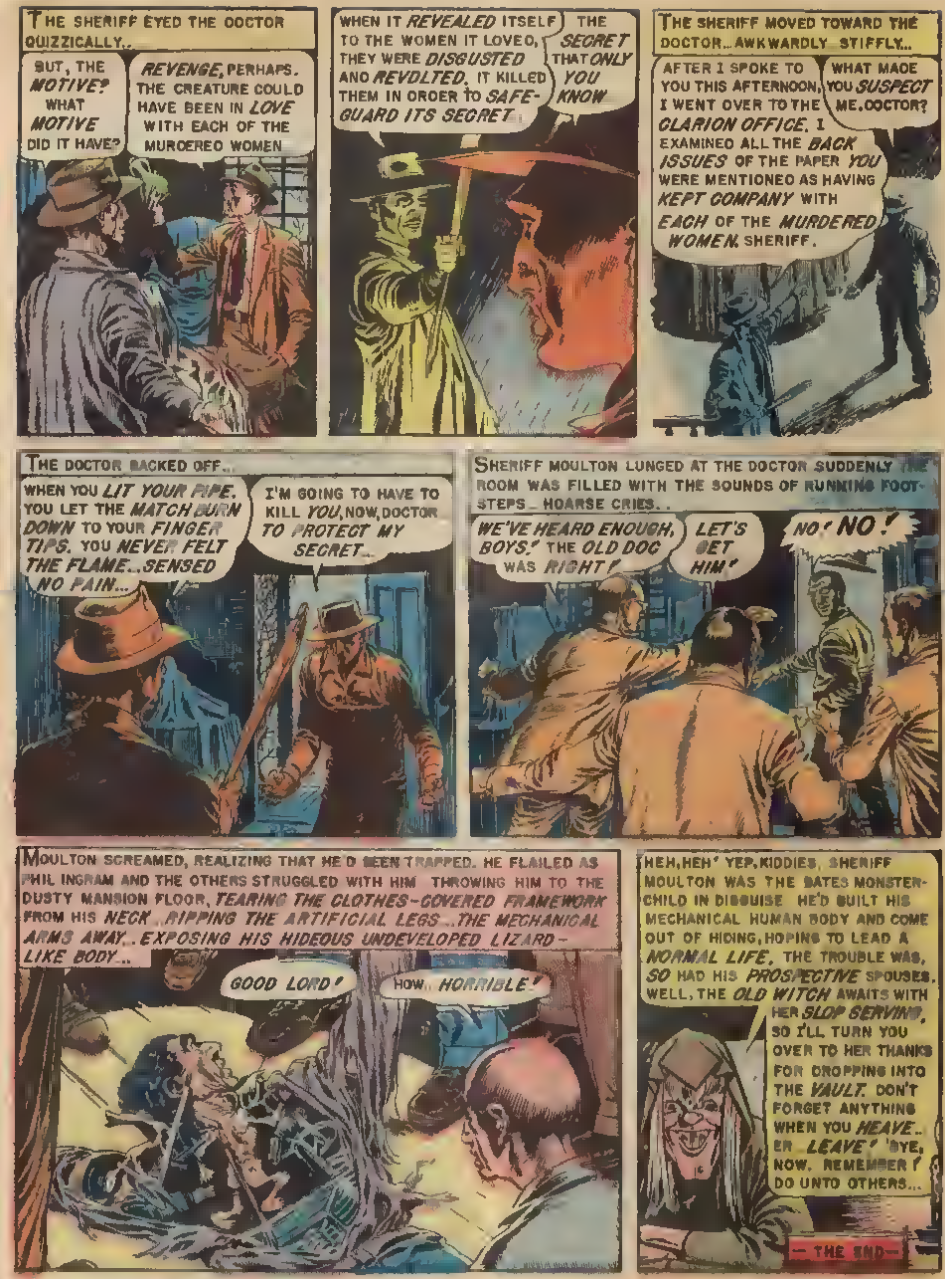
I *SAW* THE CHILD *ONCE MORE* AFTER THAT, SHERIFF. IT WAS JUST BEFORE I SOLD MY PRACTICE AND LEFT HILLDALE. I CAME UP HERE TO SAY GOOD-BYE TO MRS. BATES. THE CHILD CAME OUT OF THE KITCHEN. THERE, SLITHERING...

'SLITHERING ALONG ON ITS UNDEVELOPED HANDS AND FEET LIKE SOME WEIRD LIZARD WITH A HUMAN HEAD.'

THE DOCTOR STARED INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE EMPTY, DUST-LADEN LIVING ROOM OF THE OLD MANSION, LISTENING.

AND *YOU* THINK THIS...THIS... *MONSTER-CHILD* IS OUR *KILLER*, EH, DOC?

A CREATURE OF *THAT SORT* COULD GET *INTO* A *ROOM* THAT IS *ORDINARILY INACCESSIBLE* TO A *FULLY DEVELOPED HUMAN BEING*. IT COULD *SLIDE THROUGH VENTILATION SYSTEMS*... *COME DOWN CHIMNEY FLUES*...


THE SHERIFF EYED THE DOCTOR QUIZZICALLY..
BUT, THE MOTIVE? WHAT MOTIVE DID IT HAVE?
REVENGE, PERHAPS. THE CREATURE COULD HAVE BEEN IN LOVE WITH EACH OF THE MURDERED WOMEN
WHEN IT REVEALED ITSELF TO THE WOMEN IT LOVED, THEY WERE DISGUSTED AND REVOLTED. IT KILLED THEM IN ORDER TO SAFE-GUARD ITS SECRET..
THE SECRET THAT ONLY YOU KNOW
THE SHERIFF MOVED TOWARD THE DOCTOR.. AWKWARDLY STIFFLY...
AFTER I SPOKE TO YOU THIS AFTERNOON, I WENT OVER TO THE CLARION OFFICE. I EXAMINED ALL THE BACK ISSUES OF THE PAPER YOU WERE MENTIONED AS HAVING KEPT COMPANY WITH EACH OF THE MURDERED WOMEN. SHERIFF.
WHAT MADE YOU SUSPECT ME, DOCTOR?
THE DOCTOR BACKED OFF..
WHEN YOU LIT YOUR PIPE, YOU LET THE MATCH BURN DOWN TO YOUR FINGER TIPS. YOU NEVER FELT THE FLAME.. SENSED NO PAIN...
I'M GOING TO HAVE TO KILL YOU, NOW, DOCTOR.. TO PROTECT MY SECRET..
SHERIFF MOULTON LUNGED AT THE DOCTOR SUDDENLY THE ROOM WAS FILLED WITH THE SOUNDS OF RUNNING FOOT-STEPS_ HOARSE CRIES..
WE'VE HEARD ENOUGH, BOYS!' THE OLD DOC WAS RIGHT!
LET'S GET HIM!
NO! NO!
MOULTON SCREAMED, REALIZING THAT HE'D BEEN TRAPPED. HE FLAILED AS PHIL INGRAM AND THE OTHERS STRUGGLED WITH HIM THROWING HIM TO THE DUSTY MANSION FLOOR, TEARING THE CLOTHES-COVERED FRAMEWORK FROM HIS NECK.. RIPPING THE ARTIFICIAL LEGS.. THE MECHANICAL ARMS AWAY.. EXPOSING HIS HIDEOUS UNDEVELOPED LIZARD-LIKE BODY..
GOOD LORD!
HOW... HORRIBLE!
HEH, HEH! YEP, KIDDIES, SHERIFF MOULTON WAS THE BATES MONSTER-CHILD IN DISGUISE HE'D BUILT HIS MECHANICAL HUMAN BODY AND COME OUT OF HIDING, HOPING TO LEAD A NORMAL LIFE. THE TROUBLE WAS, SO HAD HIS PROSPECTIVE SPOUSES. WELL, THE OLD WITCH AWAITS WITH HER SLOP SERVING, SO I'LL TURN YOU OVER TO HER THANKS FOR DROPPING INTO THE VAULT. DON'T FORGET ANYTHING WHEN YOU HEAVE.. ER.. LEAVE! 'BYE, NOW. REMEMBER! DO UNTO OTHERS...
— THE END —

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE! AND HOW THAT THOSE *TWO OLD GEEZERS* HAVE *TEMPTED YOUR APPETITES* FOR *HORROR* WITH THEIR, SHALL WE SAY, *EVIL ENTREES*. IT'S TIME FOR THE *LAST COURSE*... THE *WIND-UP* TO *V. K.'S PUTRID PERIODICAL*. YEP... IT'S *ME* THE OLD WITCH, MISTRESS OF THE HAUNT OF FEAR, READY TO SERVE A *DELIGHTFUL DESSERT* OF *DELIRIOUS*. *READY?* THEN OPEN YOUR *MOUTH* AND I'LL *PUPPET* IN ' I *CALL* THIS *SCREAM-SCOOPING*

STRUNG ALONG!

THE MARIONETTES, HANGING LIMPLY FROM THEIR RACK BESIDE TONY'S BED, TURNED LAZILY IN THE NIGHT BREEZE THAT WAFTED THROUGH THE OPEN WINDOW. TONY FINGERED THEM ABSENTLY, STARING UP AT THE HEAVY BEAMS THAT CROSSED THE ARCHED CEILING ABOVE HIS HEAD. TEARS FILLED HIS EYES AND RAN DOWN INTO THE WRINKLES THAT ETCHED HIS FORTY-ODD-YEAR-OLD FACE. HIS VOICE WAS SOFT AND SAD AND TOUCHED WITH LONELINESS.

I'M *I'M DYING*, MY LITTLE STRINGED FRIENDS. I'M *DYING* AND *SHE* DOESN'T *CARE*. SHE *DOESN'T CARE AT ALL*.

TONY TURNED TO THE LIFELESS FIGURES SUSPENDED BESIDE HIM. KOKO, THE CLOWN... VANYA, THE BALLET DANCER, SIR THOMAS, THE GALLANT KNIGHT... THE OTHERS. HE SHOOK HIS HEAD SADLY..

SHE *COULD* HAVE *WAITED!* SHE DIDN'T *HAVE* TO TELL ME *TONIGHT*... OF *ALL* NIGHTS. SHE COULD HAVE LET ME *DIE BELIEVING SHE LOVED ME*...

THE MARIONETTES HUNG MOTIONLESS NOW, FOR THE BREEZE HAD FADED. TONY TOUCHED EACH ONE LOVINGLY, TUGGING A STRING HERE... THERE, MAKING KOKO WAVE GAYLY, VANYA KICK IMPISHLY...

YOU'RE ALL I HAVE LEFT NOW, LITTLE ONES. ALL I HAVE LEFT

TONY SMILED WARMLY AS HE FINGERED THE BRIGHTLY COLORED FIGURES...

REMEMBER WHEN I *MADE* YOU, *KOKO*...SO *MANY YEARS AGO*. I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE MOST *BEAUTIFUL MARIONETTE* IN THE *WHOLE WORLD*.

'I WORKED *WEEKS* ON YOU...CARVING YOUR HEAD, YOUR ARMS, YOUR LEGS, AND SEWING YOUR COSTUME...'

'REMEMBER OUR *FIRST SHOW TOGETHER*? I WAS SO *NERVOUS*. BUT WHEN THE *CURTAIN* WAS OPENED AND YOU WERE *PERFORMING* AND THE AUDIENCE WAS *LAUGHING*, I WASN'T *AFRAID ANYMORE*...'

'AND AFTER THAT, I MADE *YOU*, VANYA, AND YOU *JOINED* OUR SHOW, AND THE PEOPLE *CHEERED* YOUR GRACEFUL ARABESQUES...YOUR DAINTY PIROUETTES...'

'WE WERE A *SUCCESS*, WE THREE. AND I MADE *MORE* OF YOU. *SIR THOMAS*...THE *REST* OF YOU I HAD *MORE BOOKINGS* THAN I COULD *FILL*. BUT *YOU* WERE MADE OF *WOOD* AND *CLOTH* AND *WORKED BY STRINGS*. AFTER THE SHOWS YOU JUST *HUNG* THERE, *SILENT, MOTIONLESS*, AND I WAS *LONELY*.'

'I PULLED YOUR *STRINGS* AND YOU *CAME ALIVE* AND *MADE ME RICH*. BUT YOU *COULDN'T* GIVE ME WHAT I *REALLY NEEDED*. YOU COULDN'T GIVE ME *LOVE*... *COMPANIONSHIP*. AND THEN I *MET* SOMEONE WHO COULD *GIVE* ME THESE THINGS...'

I'VE OFTEN *ADMIRED* YOU, MR. ZARGONO.

CALL ME *TONY*...AND I WILL CALL YOU *NORA*!

'I FELL IN LOVE WITH NORA, AND SHE IN TURN LOVED ME. SO WE WERE MARRIED'

GOOD LUCK, YOU TWO!

HAPPY HONEYMOON!

JUSTMARRIED!

'NORA BROUGHT *LIGHT* INTO MY *DARK LONELY LIFE. TOGETHER*, WE TOURED THE *WORLD*. AND SHE SAT WITH *PRESIDENTS* AND *KINGS* AS *I* ENTERTAINED..'

BRAVO!

YOUR *HUSBAND* IS *AMAZING*, MRS. ZARGONO.

YES.

'AND *YOU*, MY FAITHFUL FRIENDS YOU PERFORMED *WELL* FOR ME. I WAS ABLE TO BUY NORA *EVERY-THING*...*JEWELRY*...*FURS*...'

LIKE IT, NORA?

IT'S *BEAUTIFUL*, TONY!

..*THIS LOVELY TUDOR MAHSION* WITH ITS STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS AND BEAMED CATHEDRAL CEILINGS..'

IT'S *ALL YOURS*, DARLING.

OH, TONY...

'I WORKED *HARD* FOR HER. AND IN TURN WORKED *ALL OF YOU HARD*. BUT WHEN SOMETHING WENT *WRONG* WITH ANY OF *YOU*, I COULD FIX IT. *NOBODY* FIX IT

I'LL HAVE YOU FIXED IN A JIFFY, KOKO.

'BUT THERE WAS *NO REPAIRING ME* WHEN *I BROKE DOWN*. THE DOCTORS TOLD ME..'

IT'S YOUR *HEART*, MR. ZARGONO. YOU CAN *NEVER WORK* AGAIN.

'NORA SEEMED *ALL BROKEN UP* WHEN I TOLD HER THE SAD NEWS. I THOUGHT SHE WAS *CONCERNED* ABOUT ME... MY *HEALTH*...'

NEVER WORK AGAIN, TONY? BUT *WHAT* WILL WE *DO*?

WE HAVE THE *HOUSE*, NORA. WE'LL *RETIRE*..TAKE IT *EASY*.

'I WENT INTO *FORCED RETIREMENT*. *BOOKINGS* WERE *CANCELLED*...*CONTRACTS* TORN UP THE *GREAT TONY ZARGONO*... THE *MASTER PUPPETEER* WAS *NUNG AWAY* LIKE ONE OF HIS OWN MARIONETTES...'

IT'S *NICE* HERE IN THE SUN, *ISN'T* IT, NORA?

YES.

'NORA TRIED TO NURSE ME BACK TO HEALTH. SHE CALLED IN *DOCTOR* AFTER *DOCTOR*, BUT *THEY ALL SHOOK THEIR HEADS*...'

IF HE *WORKS* AGAIN, IT WILL *KILL* HIM. EVEN AN *EMOTIONAL SHOCK*...

OH?

'*BILLS* PILED UP. OUR *SAVINGS* WENT. NORA WAS FORCED TO *SELL* HER *JEWELRY*...HER *FURS*... HER *CAR*. SHE GREW *COLD*...'

NORA, *DON'T* BE *ANGRY!* I *KNOW* HOW YOU *LOVED* YOUR PRETTY THINGS, BUT I CAN'T *HELP* IT. IF I WERE *WELL*...

ALL RIGHT, TONY! *ALL RIGHT!* LET'S NOT *TALK* ABOUT IT!

'SOON, ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS *THIS HOUSE* AND *YOU*...MY *STARVED FRIEND*. NORA *TRIED* TO MAKE ME *SELL YOU ALSO*...BUT *THAT*, I *REFUSED TO DO*...'

NO, NORA! *NOT* MY *MARIONETTES!* NOW THAT I'M *BEDRIDDEN*, THEY *HELP PASS THE TIME*...

BUT WE *NEED* THE *MONEY!* YOU'RE *RIDICULOUS!*

'I WAS *DYING*. I *KNEW* IT. BUT I COULD *FACE* DEATH. NORA WAS *BLOIDE* ME. NORA *MY WIFE*...WHO *LOVED* ME. AS LONG AS I *BELIEVED THAT*, I COULD FACE *ANYTHING*...'

DARLING NORA. YOU'VE *MADE MY LIFE COMPLETE*. KNOWING YOU *LOVE* ME HAS...

DON'T *KID* YOURSELF, TONY! I *NEVER LOVED YOU!* I LOVED THE *THINGS* YOU COULD *GIVE* ME.

'THEN, NORA TOLD ME THE *TRUTH*. SHE STOOD BESIDE MY BED AND *TOLD* ME...TONIGHT...'

NORA! WHAT ARE YOU *SAYING?*

YOU HEARD ME! I MARRIED YOU FOR YOUR *MONEY! THAT'S ALL! YOUR MONEY! YOU* COULD *GIVE* ME *PRETTY THINGS*, AND I *WANTED* PRETTY THINGS. SO I *PUT ON AN ACT*...

'HER EYES WERE FILLED WITH *HATE* AND HER MOUTH WAS TWISTED INTO A *SCORNFUL SNEER* AS SHE SPEWED FORTH HER *INVECTIVE*...'

ACTUALLY, I *DESPISED* YOU! I *LOATHED* YOU...YOUR *TOUCH*...YOUR *CARESS*...YOUR *KISS!* BUT WHILE YOU COULD *GIVE* ME WHAT I LIKED, I *TOLERATED* YOU...

'AND AS SHE RAVED, I FELT THE PAIN IN MY CHEST GROW IN INTENSITY..'
WHEN YOU GOT SICK, I STUCK AROUND' I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT GET BETTER' NOW.. WHEN I THINK OF THE TIME I'VE WASTED...
NORA.. PLEASE... DON'T...
'THE PAIN.. GROWING UNTIL IT FELT AS IF A STEEL VISE WERE CRUSHING MY HEART BETWEEN ITS POWERFUL JAWS..'
DON'T YOU LIKE THE TRUTH, TONY? DON'T YOU? WELL, NOW YOU KNOW! I'VE HATED YOU FROM THE BEGINNING...
NORA... CHOKE... YOU'RE KILLING ME!
AM I, SUCKER? AM I KILLING YOU? WELL THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO DO. I'D LIKE TO BE FREE OF YOU.. WHILE I'M STILL YOUNG..
GASP..
'THE ATTACK CAME.. JUST AS THE DOCTORS HAD PREDICTED. NORA STOOD THERE, HER FACE A STONE MASK, WATCHING ME WRITHE..'
'AND THEN SHE WALKED OUT.. LAUGHING..'
NORA.. COME BACK
'AND I'VE BEEN LYING HERE, WAITING... LISTENING.. HOPING SHE'D RETURN.. HOPING TO AWAKEN FROM THIS BAD DREAM. THE ATTACK HAS PASSED, AND I FEEL MYSELF FADING.. KNOWING I AM DYING..'
NORA.. SOB..
5

TONY WIPED AWAY A TEAR, FINGERING THE LIMP MARIONETTES HANGING BESIDE HIM...
SO..YOU'RE ALL I HAVE LEFT NOW, LITTLE ONES. ALL I HAVE..SOB LEFT. SHE WON'T BE BACK
THE BREEZE COMING IN THE OPEN WINDOW STIRRED THE SUSPENDED FIGURES AS TONY CLOSED HIS EYES... MURMURING SADLY...
NORA..SOB NORA..
..AND AFTER A WHILE HE SLEPT...
A SOUND MADE TONY OPEN HIS EYES. HE LOOKED TOWARD THE DOORWAY OF HIS BEDROOM. SHE STOOD THERE, SILHOUETTED IN THE HALL LIGHT...
NORA!
SHE GLIDED TOWARD HIM. HE REACHED FOR THE LIGHT. SHE PUT HER HAND ON HIS, SHAKING HER HEAD...
BUT I CAN'T SEE YOU! OR DON'T YOU WANT ME TO SEE YOU?
SHE FELL TO HER KNEES BESIDE HIS BED. HE REACHED OUT, TOUCHING HER CHEEK...
ARE THOSE TEARS, NORA? ARE YOU CRYING? IS THAT WHY YOU WON'T LET ME TURN ON THE LIGHTS?
SHE NODDED, KISSING HIS HAND, HER BODY HEAVING WITH PITIFUL QUIET SOBS...
OH, NORA! YOU DIDN'T MEAN WHAT YOU SAID, DID YOU!? YOU'RE SORRY! YOU'VE COME BACK TO TELL ME...
SHE NODDED AGAIN, LYING HER HEAD UPON HIS CHEST.
NORA.. NORA... I KNEW YOU LOVED ME! I KNEW IT.. DON'T SAY ANYTHING! THERE'S NO NEED!
6

TORY CUPPED NORA'S CHIN IN HIS HAND, STROKING HER SOFT HAIR.

I'M *GLAD* YOU CAME TO ME, NORA. I'M *GLAD* YOU WOULDN'T LET ME *DIE* BELIEVING YOU *DIDN'T LOVE ME...*

SHE SHOOK HER HEAD...CLINGING TO HIM.. KISSING HIS CHEEK.. HER LIPS DAMP AND TWITCHING WITH PASSION...

I *AM* GOING TO DIE TONIGHT, NORA! I *KNOW IT!* BUT I CAN DIE *HAPPY* NOW, MY DEAREST, KNOWING THAT YOU *DO* LOVE ME.

HE TOOK HER IN HIS ARMS, KISSING HER SOFT WET LIPS. WHISPERING...

COME TO ME. DARLING MARE MY *LAST NIGHT* COMPLETE...

AFTER A WHILE TONY LAY BACK UPON HIS PILLOW, GAZING UP INTO THE DARKNESS, GASPING FOR BREATH. HIS WORDS WERE A SOFT WHISPER CARRIED AWAY BY THE NIGHT BREEZE

THANK YOU, NORA...GASP...

THEY FOUND NORA AND TONY LYING SIDE BY SIDE THE NEXT MORNING. THEY WERE BOTH DEAD. TONY HAD DIED HAPPILY DURING THE NIGHT, A SMILE UPON HIS FACE.

BUT NORA HAD DIED MUCH *EARLIER...VIOLENTLY.* SHE LAY WITH THE *BLOOD* THAT HAD BEEN *MISTAKEN FOR TEARS* NOW *DRIED* UPON HER CHEEKS. SHE LAY, LIMPLY, BESIDE TONY, THE *RIGID DISMEMBERED SECTIONS OF HER BODY HELD TOGETHER BY TINY HINGES SCREWED INTO THE JOINT-BONES.* COUNTLESS *FINE, ALMOST INVISIBLE, STRINGS* RAN FROM *EACH MOVABLE SECTION* TO THE *CEILING BEAM* OVER THE BED. THE *MARIONETTE RACK* WAS *EMPTY.* THE GRINNING MARIONETTES WERE FOUND SPRAWLED UPON THE BEAM, NORA'S *STRINGS TIED* TO THEIR *LIFELESS HANDS...*

HEE, HEE, NOW *THERE'S* A STORY THAT *TUGS* AT THE *HEART-STRINGS,* EH, KIDDIES? SO NORA HAD *TONY* ON THE *ROPES..* AND TONY'S MARIONETTES HAD *ROPES* ON *HER.* WELL, I'LL HAVE THE OLD *PEW-POT* SEETHING ONCE MORE IN MY *OWN* MAG, *THE HAUNT OF FEAR, WHEN..* I AS THE SIDE OF *BEEF* SAID TO HIS *OLD RANGE-PAL* HANGING NEXT TO HIM IN THE *BUTCHER'S ICE-BOX)... 'WE MEAT AGAIN!'*

— THE END —

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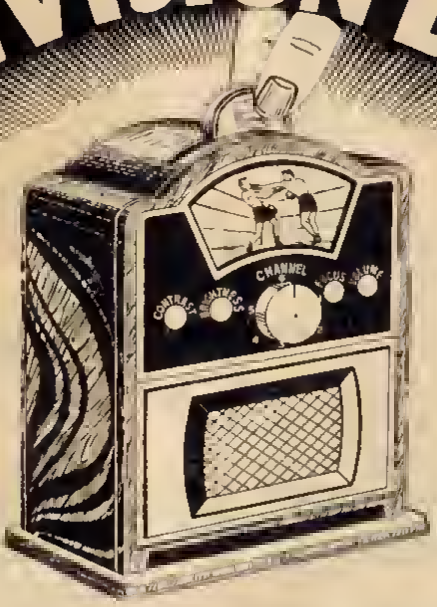

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